

To our Honorable Governor Malloy, Legislators and Municipal Officials,

Thank you for offering me the chance to express my concerns over the recently proposed changes of organizational and funding structure for Services for the Blind.

I have been a client of the agency since becoming legally blind in 2007. I am fully employed in a professional capacity at United Technologies, Hamilton Sundstrand Division and thankfully have been employed there for almost 5 years. Upon the life changing event of sudden illness resulting in blindness due to a rare and sudden side effect of a prescribed medication, I was introduced to BESB, their programs and services and staff.

Services for the Blind worked with me and my company to help coordinate my retrain on adaptive software, workplace skills, mobility training and vocational rehabilitation to aid me in my return to work full-time in less than 10 months, including hospitalization. I attribute the success of the return to work partnership partly to my and my company's desire to find a solution, but mostly to BESB for helping us but the steps, software and trainings in place for us all to share the success.

It is my sincere experience and experience that the time and dedication of the staff are critical. They need to be able to function separately and focus only on the targeted population they serve to improve the staggering statistic of 70% unemployment rate of the blind in Connecticut.

There are 3 main concerns I have with the BESB group being absorbed for children by DCF and adults by DHHS:

1) There objectives then are subject to current departmental needs and pressures which will diminish the impact they have and the autonomy of priority setting. I am very concerned the voice of the blind will be lost among the mounting causes for children and in my eyes the needs of the blind still deserve some unique consideration.

2) The change could promote consolidation of team and human capital resources - The agency is already constrained with many working more than standard hours and facing mounting stress of working more with less. I am concerned that there will be the breaking rubber band effect as more duties and blending of roles is likely with the absorption into new organizations. The likelihood of more staff is minimal, which really equates to less time being spent with each client and a reduction in personal attention to client's needs ultimately.

3) Revised budgets and elimination of services. An info office environment for BESB would be detrimental to the quality of service provided to clients. It is critical to see the environment in which the client operates. Whether home, work or school. I am deeply concerned that in the process of 're-evaluating', some standardization of processing will be implemented and it will become form letter style service. Having BESB come to my home was not a luxury, it was the beginning of my re-entry into life and they were there every step in my process of retuning to work and stabilizing my home and independence.

I have resided in Connecticut for almost 5 years and am a visually-impaired income and property tax-paying registered voter who is asking as a very engaged citizen of the civic, social and community fabric that you reconsider consolidation/absorption of BESB services, staff or budget to any other organization as any portion of resolution to the Connecticut budget crunch. The services provided are critical to quality of life and will greatly impact the lives of otherwise productive children and adults.

Please feel free to contact me regarding this communication or my concerns.

Thanks you.

Respectfully submitted,

Nyema R. Pinkney
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